

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

INFORMATION REPORT

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SOURCE:

1. The organization controlling trade unions in Hungary was the National Trade Union Council (Szakszervezetek Országos Tanácsa-SZOT), located in a new seven story building at Dózsa György Street 84, Budapest VI. Chairman of SZOT was (fnu) HARUSTYÁK, formerly a member of the Social Democratic Party, who probably could not have gotten this job without having joined the Hungarian Worker's Party. The policies and activities of SZOT and the unions have been determined by the Hungarian Workers' Party ever since the Communists assumed complete control of all trade unions in 1949.
2. Every government enterprise or office had a Trade Union Committee headed by a chairman who also served as secretary. The local trade union in an enterprise was subdivided into basic trade union organs after the pattern of the Hungarian Workers' Party organization. The number of basic trade union organs in an enterprise corresponded to the number of Party basic organs subordinated to the Party Committee in an enterprise. A basic organ in a factory was usually a work shop or section and, in a ministry, a division. A deputy of the Trade Union Committee was responsible for the activities of each basic trade union organ.
3. The Trade Union Committee held weekly meetings, usually a day after a meeting of secretaries held by the Party Committee secretary. At the Trade Union Committee meeting, which all basic trade union organ deputies (or secretaries) attended, Party directives relating to the trade union were discussed. The day after this meeting, a meeting was held of all "actives" or functionaries of the basic trade union organs, after which the directives of the Trade Union Committee were discussed at a membership meeting.

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4. A Trade Union Day was held once a month in every enterprise. A meeting on that day started after work at 1700 hours and often lasted until midnight. The meeting always ended with the singing of the "Internationale". Problems of production and current economic problems were discussed at this meeting.
5. The activities of a trade union in an enterprise included the following, described hereafter in detail, each directed by a deputy of the Trade Union Committee:
 - a. Operation of the enterprise kitchen and day homes or nurseries.
 - b. Workers' recreation.
 - c. Organization and direction of work competitions.
 - d. Billeting of workers.
 - e. Operation and maintenance of the enterprise library and culture room.
 - f. Organization and direction of the organization "Ready for Work and Fight" (Munkara Harcra Kesz--MHK).
 - g. Financial assistance to workers.
 - h. Fuel procurement.
 - i. Keeping of records of membership dues and membership affairs.
 - j. Visits to sick workers and the Trade Union Social Security Center (Szakszervezeti Tarsadalom Biztositasi Koezpont--SZTK).

The Enterprise Kitchen

6. The Trade Union Committee was responsible for the setting up and management of the enterprise kitchen. If there was no kitchen in an enterprise, the Committee was responsible for the procurement of meals for workers. In that case, lunches were brought to the enterprise from the Budapest Food Provision Enterprise (Budapesti Etelgyar Elelmezesi Vallalat), located at Soroksar Street 90/98, Budapest IX. The manager of the enterprise kitchen, the chief cook, and other kitchen personnel, were paid by the enterprise. The kitchen equipment was bought by the trade union.
7. Typical items on the menu were daily soup without fat, 200 gr. of paste (with poppy seed, cheese, jam, cabbage, etc.) once a week, a vegetable dish (beans, peas, lentils, cabbage, tomatoes, etc.) twice a week. Once a week one frankfurter-like sausage, or about 50 gr. of beef, was added to the vegetable dish and, once a week, on Fridays, a pork goulash was served, containing three or four small pieces of pork or 50 gr. of smoked pork. Pork was served intentionally on Fridays to offend the Catholics.
8. Payment for lunches was deducted from employees' salaries proportionately in advance. Thus, for instance, in the Foundries and Machine Industries Ministry, the charwomen paid the minimum of two forints for lunch, while others paid more for the same lunch, according to their salaries, but never more than four forints. For each meal employees turned in coupons torn out of a coupon book. The color of the coupon book changed every week. Lunch was served cafeteria style and after eating each employee had to take his dirty dishes and silverware to the dishwasher. Lunch was served in the Ministry, as well as in all government offices, from 1200 to 1500 hours. In most enterprises no meals were served on Saturdays.

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9. In the Foundries and Machine Industries Ministry a separate buffet was set up to help supplement the cafeteria meals. In this buffet employees could buy additional food, e.g. sliced sausages, cheese, butter, fruit, and bread. A slice of bread cost 20 fillers. The employees could also get breakfast at 0700 hours.
10. The day home or nursery of the Foundries and Machine Industries Ministry was located in an eight room apartment on Sagvari Square, where Nador and Bathory Streets meet. Employees could take children up to six years of age there to be cared for during the day. The children were given breakfast, lunch and dinner. Both the Trade Union Committee and the Party Committee supervised the care of these children, and a special program was devised for them.

Workers' Recreation

11. The Trade Union Committee established and managed vacation places for workers, many of them on Lake Balaton. The food was neither good nor plentiful, and workers who had enough money supplemented their meals by buying extra food. Bed linen was changed once every two weeks. Occasionally propaganda programs were presented in the evenings, but otherwise there was not much activity. Every guest had to be in his room by midnight. Stakhanovites got special treatment. Their food was first class and the 14 days spent on vacation there were not charged against their leave.

Work Competitions

12. In accordance with Party instructions, the trade unions maintained constant propaganda for work competitions, and in each basic trade union organ a deputy was responsible for organizing competitions for such occasions as Stalin's birthday, Rakosi's birthday, Liberation Day, May Day, Constitution Day, and the Soviet October Revolution Day. In the Foundries and Machine Industries Ministry work competitions were held, for example, between production divisions controlling various heavy industry enterprises in such things as production, economy of materials, collection of old iron and metals, rags, etc. Various medals were awarded for exceptional accomplishments. A reward in money went with the medals. A reward of 5,000 forints was given with a gold medal, 3,000 forints went with a silver medal, and 2,000 forints with a bronze medal.

Billeting

13. In the matter of billeting, the Trade Union Committee of an enterprise collected from all basic organs the names and addresses of employees or workers who had been transferred from other enterprises and who did not have quarters within 20 km. of their current job. Suitable quarters were found for all such workers through the enterprise. In the assignment of apartments Party standing and rank were important considerations. The trade union secretary had to report constantly to the Party secretary, who issued the billeting directives, and the enterprise's Trade Union Committee actually had very limited authority. Thus, outstanding workers, such as Stakhanovites, were given new apartments. Ministers and deputy ministers were billeted in villas, or even castles, in the choice districts of Rozsadomb, Pasaret and Gellerthegey. Many employees were placed in apartments and houses of internees. By the end of 1951 rebuilding in Budapest had progressed so far that it was hardly possible to find ruins from wartime bombing, but there were still not enough dwellings. In 1951, the City Council was able to assign to the Foundries and Machine Industries Ministry, for instance, only 40 apartments of the 100 apartments requested.

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Libraries and Culture Rooms

14. Every enterprise or office had its own trade union library, open three days a week after work hours, from which books could be borrowed for home reading free of charge. The books for the library were furnished by SZOT and every library had to contain the following books, among many others: Marx's Das Kapital; Lenin and Stalin's Two Steps Forward, One Step Backward; The Basis of Leninism; Problems of Leninism; Lenin's life; Stalin's Works (in 16 volumes; a new edition in 60 volumes was in preparation and by April 1952 about 20 volumes of it had appeared); The Great Socialist October Revolution; Zhdanov's life; Kirov; The Great Patriot; Soviet Plan to Change Nature; History of the Soviet Union's Communist Party; Successes of the Development of Soviet Kolkhozes; Soviet Agrarian Technique; Matyas Rakosi's life; Communism in 1919 (in Hungary); Rakosi's The Year of Turning Point; Rakosi's selected speeches and articles; Geroe's The Five Year Plan. Most of the fiction consisted of translations from the Russian. There were very few Hungarian works written before 1945. Everything was done to eliminate books which could "keep alive the illusions of the old world". Employees showed very little interest in the library. In addition to the library, every basic organ had a book representative who took orders for the purchase of books from the State publishing institute "Szikra".
15. The Trade Union Committee was responsible for maintaining a club-like "culture room" for the employees, where they could play chess and other social games, but not cards. Lectures and discussions were also held there. The program of activities in culture rooms was arranged by the Party and not by the Trade Union Committee. The deputy for cultural affairs in the enterprise received orientation once a week from the Party "agitprop" secretary.

Ready for Work and Fight Organization

16. Organization of the Ready for Work and Fight (MHK) was the responsibility of the Trade Union Committee in every enterprise. This organization was in fact a continuation in People's Democracy fashion of the prewar "Levente" movement to indoctrinate youth with Communism through sport. Members of MHK competed in various sports, such as running, swimming and jumping. Members of MHK were issued a black membership book with a photograph of the bearer.

Financial Assistance to Workers

17. Trade Union Committees granted aid to members on occasions of birth, death, or marriage. Only members who had been in the trade union for at least one year and who had paid up their membership dues were entitled to this aid, the maximum amounting to 200 forints. This amount did not have to be repaid. A union member in need of money could borrow against his salary a maximum amount of 800 forints at one per cent interest. The request for such a loan was made on a printed form which the borrower had to have signed by the following: department chief, division chief, chief of the accounting department (who certified that the borrower did not have a previous unpaid loan), and the chief of the finance department. Any one of these chiefs could prevent an employee from obtaining the loan. The blank, properly filled out and signed, was forwarded through the Trade Union Committee to the Ministry of Finance. The Ministry then forwarded the amount requested by mail to the borrower. The loan was repaid in six monthly installments, beginning the second month after the loan was obtained. Division chiefs and higher officials could obtain a State loan (Allami kölcsön), which was not handled through the trade union. The minister or his deputy had to approve such a loan. If a minister wished to get a loan himself, it had to be approved by the Prime Minister. There was no limit to the amount of this type of loan, but the usual amount granted was from 2,000 to 5,000 forints. Also, it was not important to give a special reason for needing the money.

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Fuel Procurement

18. The Trade Union Committee took care of fuel procurement for employees. Workers were allotted fuel for heat and cooking according to the size of their apartments and families. Payment for fuel was deducted from wages in monthly installments.

Membership Dues

19. Trade union membership dues were collected on the 15th of every month by the deputy in the basic trade union organ. (Party membership dues were collected on the first of each month.) The amount of dues was calculated on the basis of salary. An employee earning 1,000 forints or less per month paid a maximum of 15 forints per month in dues; on 1,000-1,300 forints, 20-25 forints; on 1,500-2,000 forints, 25-30 forints; and on 2,000-2,500 forints the dues were 30-40 forints per month. Above 2,500 forints the dues were 50 forints per month, the highest trade union membership dues. Every trade union member had a handsome water-marked membership book with enough space for 10 years of membership dues stamps. In theory a member who was three months behind in payment of his dues was supposed to lose his membership rights, but in practice this was never observed because activists hounded a member until he paid up his back dues.

Visits to Sick Workers and Social Security Center

20. The duty of deputies assigned to visit sick union members was not only to call upon them socially but to assure that the worker was actually sick and not simulating sickness. A worker who did not show up for work was visited that very day by a deputy. If the deputy found the worker was actually sick he would call a doctor. A worker received 60% of his pay while he was sick and remained at home. If he went to a hospital he received only 33% of his pay. Many workers left the hospital before they should in order to receive more money. All hospitals and clinics were under the control of the Trade Union Social Security Center. Sick benefits were paid at the place of work. Every enterprise had a SZTK deputy who administered all matters connected with sick personnel. A sick worker did not have to report for sick papers because in every employee's work certificate the enterprise in which he was employed was noted on the inside with the SZTK number and stamp. When a worker was transferred to another enterprise, his old enterprise identification certificate was withdrawn and a new one issued. He also received a new SZTK (or social security) number.

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